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SELECTED VERSE

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A Victory Dance
and
Other Poems Old and New

BY

ALFRED NOYES

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I.

EARTH AND HER BIRDS.

(SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF SINGS.)

BRAVE birds that climb those blue
Dawn-tinted towers,
With notes like showers of dew
From elf-tossed flowers,
Shake your mad wings in mirth,
Betray, betray
The secret thoughts of May,
That heaven, once more, may marry our wild earth.

Dark gipsy, she would dance
Unmated still,
Challenging, glance for glance,
Her lord's high will,
But that her thoughts take wing
While she lies sleeping ;
And, into glory leaping,
Like birds, at sunrise, to her bridegroom sing.

See how with cheeks aglow
And lips apart,
While warm winds, murmuring low
Lay bare her heart,

Earth and her Birds.

She dreams that she can hide
 Its rosy light
 In ferns and flowers this night,
And swim like Dian through this hawthorn-tide.

Then shame her, lavrocks, shame her,
 At break of day,
That heaven may trap and tame her
 This mad sweet May.
Let all your feathered choir
 Leave those warm nests
 Between her dawn-flushed breasts,
And soar to heaven, singing her young desire

II.

THE HILLS OF YOUTH.

ONCE, on the far blue hills,
Alone with the pine and the cloud, in those high still
places ;

Alone with a whisper of ferns and a chuckle of rills,
And the peat-brown pools that mirrored the angels'
faces,

Pools that mirrored the wood-pigeon's grey-blue
feather,

And all my thistledown dreams as they drifted along;
Once, oh ! once, on the hills, thro' the red-bloomed
heather

I followed an elfin song.

Once, by the wellsprings of joy,
In the glens of the hart's-tongue fern, where the
brooks came leaping

Over the rocks, like a scrambling barefoot boy
That never has heard of a world grown old with
weeping ;

Once, thro' the golden gorse (Do the echoes linger

In Paradise woods, where the foam of the may
runs wild ?)

I followed the flute of a light-foot elfin singer,

A god, with the eyes of a child.

The Hills of Youth.

Once, he sang to me there,
From a crag on a thyme-clad height where the dew
still glistened ;
He sang like the spirit of Spring in that dawn-
flushed air,
While the angels opened their doors and the whole
sky listened :
He sang like the soul of a rainbow, if heaven could
hear it,
Beating to heaven, on wings that were April's own ;
A song too happy and brave for the heart to bear it,
Had the heart of the hearer known.

Once, ah ! once, no more,
The hush and the rapture of youth in those holy
places,
The stainless height, the hearts that sing and adore
Till the sky breaks out into flower with the angels'
faces !
Once, in the dawn, they were mine ; but the noon
bereft me.
At midnight, now, in an ebb of the loud world's
roar,
I catch but a broken stave of the songs that left me
On hills that are mine no more.

III.

A VICTORY DANCE.¹

THE cymbals crash,
And the dancers walk,
With long silk stockings
And arms of chalk,
Butterfly skirts,
And white breasts bare,
And shadows of dead men
Watching 'em there.

Shadows of dead men
Stand by the wall,
Watching the fun
Of the Victory Ball.
They do not reproach,
Because they know,
If they're forgotten,
It's better so.

¹ This poem is not an attack on one of the most graceful of the arts, but was suggested by one particular method of celebrating the last hour of the world's Calvary.

A Victory Dance.

Under the dancing
Feet are the graves.
Dazzle and motley,
In long bright waves,
Brushed by the palm-fronds
Grapple and whirl
Ox-eyed matron,
And slim white girl.

Fat wet bodies
Go waddling by,
Girdled with satin,
Though God knows why ;
Gripped by satyrs
In white and black,
With a fat wet hand
On the fat wet back.

See, there is one child
Fresh from school,
Learning the ropes
As the old hands rule.
God, how the dead men
Chuckle again,
As she begs for a dose
Of the best cocaine.

“ What did you think
We should find,” said a shade,
“ When the last shot echoed
And peace was made ? ”

A Victory Dance.

"Christ," laughed the fleshless
Jaws of his friend,
"I thought they'd be praying
For worlds to mend,

"Making earth better,
Or something silly,
Like white-washing hell
Or Picca-dam-dilly.
They've a sense of humour,
These women of ours,
These exquisite lilies,
These fresh young flowers ! "

"Pish," said a statesman
Standing near,
"I'm glad they can busy
Their thoughts elsewhere !
We mustn't reproach 'em.
They're young, you see."
"Ah," said the dead men,
"So were we ! "

*Victory ! Victory !
On with the dance !
Back to the jungle
The new beasts prance !
God, how the dead men
Grin by the wall,
Watching the fun
Of the Victory Ball.*

IV.

DISTANT VOICES.

REMEMBER the house of thy father,
When the palaces open before thee,
And the music would make thee forget.
When the cities are glittering around thee,
Remember the lamp in the evening,
The loneliness and the peace.

When the deep things that cannot be spoken
Are drowned in a riot of laughter,
And the proud wine foams in thy cup ;
In the day when thy wealth is upon thee,
Remember thy path through the pine-wood,
Remember the ways of thy peace.

Remember—remember—remember—
When the cares of this world and its treasure
Have dulled the swift eyes of thy youth ;
When beauty and longing forsake thee,
And there is no hope in the darkness,
And the soul is drowned in the flesh ;

Distant Voices.

Turn, then, to the house of thy boyhood,
To the sea and the hills that would heal thee,
To the voices of those thou hast lost,
The still small voices that loved thee,
Whispering, out of the silence,
Remember—remember—remember—

*Remember the house of thy father,
Remember the paths of thy peace.*

V.

OLD GREY SQUIRREL.

A GREAT while ago, there was a school-boy.
He lived in a cottage by the sea.
And the very first thing he could remember
Was the rigging of the schooners by the quay.

He could watch them, when he woke, from his window
With the tall cranes hoisting out the freight.
And he used to think of shipping as a sea-cook,
And sailing to the Golden Gate.

For he used to buy the yellow penny dreadfuls,
And read them where he fished for conger-eels,
And listened to the lapping of the water,
The green and oily water round the keels.

There were trawlers with their shark-mouthed flat-
fish,
And red nets hanging out to dry,
And the skate the skipper kept because he liked 'em,
And landsmen never knew the fish to fry.

Old Grey Squirrel.

There were brigantines with timber out of Norroway,
Oozing with the syrups of the pine.
There were rusty dusty schooners out of Sunderland,
And ships of the Blue Cross line.

And to tumble down a hatch into the cabin
Was better than the best of broken rules ;
For the smell of 'em was like a Christmas dinner,
And the feel of 'em was like a box of tools.

And, before he went to sleep in the evening,
The very last thing that he could see
Was the sailor-men a-dancing in the moonlight
By the capstan that stood upon the quay.

*He is perched upon a high stool in London.
The Golden Gate is very far away.
They caught him, and they caged him, like a squirrel,
He is tottling up accounts, and going grey.*

*He will never, never, never sail to 'Frisko.
But the very last thing that he will see
Will be sailer-men a-dancing in the sunrise
By the capstan that stands upon the quay. . . .*

*To the tune of an old concertina,
By the capstan that stands upon the quay.*

VI.

THE WAGGON.

CRIMSON and black on the sky, a waggon of clover
Slowly goes rumbling, over the white chalk road ;
And I lie in the golden grass there, wondering why
 So little a thing
As the jingle and ring of the harness,
 The hot creak of leather,
 The peace of the plodding,
Should suddenly, stabbingly make it
Dreadful to die.

Only, perhaps, in the same blue summer weather,
Hundreds of years ago, in this field where I lie,
Cædmon, the Saxon, was caught by the self-same
thing :
The serf lying, dark with the sun, on his beautiful
wain-load,
 The jingle and clink of the harness,
 The hot creak of leather,
 The peace of the plodding ;
And wondered, O terribly wondered,
That men must die.

VII.

THE ELFIN ARTIST.

IN a glade of an elfin forest
When Sussex was Eden-new,
I came on an elvish painter
And watched as his picture grew.
A harebell nodded beside him.
He dipt his brush in its dew.

And it might be the wild thyme round him
That shone in that dark strange ring ;
But his brushes were bees' antennæ,
His knife was a wasp's blue sting ;
And his gorgeous exquisite palette
Was a butterfly's fan-shaped wing.

And he mingled its powdery colours
And painted the lights that pass,
On a delicate cobweb canvas
That gleamed like a magic glass,
And bloomed like a banner of elf-land
Between two stalks of grass ;

The Elfin Artist.

Till it shone like an angel's feather
With sky-born opal and rose,
And gold from the foot of the rainbow,
And colours that no man knows ;
And I laughed in the sweet May weather,
Because of the themes he chose.

For he painted the unseen wonders,
The tints that we all pass by,
Like the little blue wreaths of incense
That the wild thyme breathes to the sky ;
Or the first white bud of the hawthorn,
And the light in a blackbird's eye ;

And the shadows on soft white cloud-peaks
That carolling skylarks throw,—
Dark dots on the slumbering splendours
That under the wild wings flow,
Wee shadows like violets trembling
On the unseen breasts of snow ;

With petals too lovely for colour
That shake to the rapturous wings,
And grow as the bird draws near them,
And die as he mounts and sings ;—
Ah, only those exquisite brushes
Could paint these exquisite things.

VIII.

THE MAY-TREE.

THE May-tree on the hill
Stands in the night
So fragrant and so still
So dusky white,

That, stealing from the wood
In that sweet air,
You'd think Diana stood
Before you there.

If it be so, her bloom
Trembles with bliss.
She waits across the gloom
Her shepherd's kiss.

Touch her. A bird will start
From those pure snows,—
The dark and fluttering heart
Endymion knows.

IX.

THE SWIMMER'S RACE.

I.

BETWEEN the clover and the trembling sea
They stand upon the golden-shadowed shore
In naked boyish beauty, a strenuous three,
Hearing the breakers' deep Olympic roar ;
Three young athletes poised on a forward limb,
Mirrored like marble in the smooth wet sand,
Three statues, unlike marble, born to die.
The blue horizon rim
Recedes, recedes upon a lovelier land,
And England dreams beneath a Grecian sky.

II.

The dome of heaven is like one drop of dew,
Quivering and clear and cloudless, but for one
Crisp bouldered Alpine range that blinds the blue
With snowy gorges glittering to the sun :
Forward the runners lean, with outstretched hand
Waiting the word—see, how the light relieves

The Swimmer's Race.

The silken rippling muscles as they start
Spurning brown clots of sand,
Then skimming lightlier till the goal receives
The winner, head thrown back and lips apart.

III.

Now on a dry grey sun-kissed dune they lie
At rest for a moment, panting as they breathe,
And gazing upward at the unbounded sky
Sink slowly into the drifting sand beneath.
Their hands among the wild sea-poppies stray
And through their fingers let the warm sand stream
Over them, dusking all their sun-burnt white
With veils of silver grey,
Till, mixed into the distant gazer's dream
Of earth and heaven, they seem to sink from sight.

IV.

But one, athirst for the salt breeze, oppressed
With heat, has cast his brown young body free :
With arms behind his head and heaving breast
He lies and gazes at the cool bright sea ;
So young Leander, dreaming at high noon
Of Hero, longed to see the twilight drown
All but her star across that waste of waves ;
Nor could he dream how soon
Those colder breasts than hers must draw him
down,
To crueller kisses, in their dark sea-caves.

The Swimmer's Race.

V.

Now to their feet they leap and, with a shout,
Plunge through the glittering breakers without fear,
Breast the green-arching billows, and still out,
As if each dreamed the arms of Hero near ;
Now like three sunbeams through the surf they dart ;
Now like three foam-flakes, melting out of sight,
They are blent with all the glory of all the sea ;
Buried in beauty's heart ;
Merged in a myriad waves of mystic light
As life is lost in immortality.

X.

SUNLIGHT AND SEA.

GIVE me the sunlight and the sea,
And who shall take my heaven from me ?

Light of the Sun, Life of the Sun,
O, happy bold companion
Whose golden laughs round me run,
Making wine of the blue air
With wild-rose kisses everywhere,
Browning the limb, flushing the cheek,
Apple-fragrant, leopard-sleek,
Dancing from thy red-curtained East
Like a Nautch-girl to my feast,
Proud, because her lord the Spring,
Praised the way those anklets ring ;
Or wandering like a white Greek maid
Leaf-dappled through the dancing shade
Where many a green-veined leaf imprints
Breast and limb with emerald tints,
That softly net her silken shape,
But let the splendour still escape,
While rosy ghosts of roses flow
Over the supple rose and snow.

Sunlight and Sea.

But sweetest, fairest is thy face,
When we meet, when we embrace,
Where the white sand sleeps at noon
Round that lonely blue lagoon,
Fringed with one white reef of coral
Where the sea-birds faintly quarrel
And the breakers on the reef
Fade into a dream of grief,
And the palm-trees overhead
Whisper that all grief is dead.

Sister Sunlight, lead me then
Into thy healing seas again——
For when we swim out, side by side,
Like a lover with his bride,
When thy lips are salt with brine,
And thy wild eyes flash in mine,
The music of a mightier sea
Beats with my blood in harmony.
I breast the primal flood of being,
Too clear for speech, too near for seeing
And to his heart, new reconciled,
The Eternal takes his earth-bound child.

Who the essential secret spells
In those gigantic syllables,—
Flowing, ebbing, ebbing, flowing,—
Gathers wisdom past all knowing.
Song of the sea, I hear, I hear,
That deeper music of the sphere,
Catch the rhythm of sun and star,
And know what light and darkness are ;

Sunlight and Sea.

Ay, faint beginnings of a rhyme
That swells beyond the tides of time,
Beat with thy rhythm in blood and breath
And make one song of life and death.

I hear, I hear, and rest content,
Merged in the primal element,
The old element whence life arose,
The fount of youth, to which it goes.

Give me the sunlight and the sea,
And who shall take my heaven from me ?

XI.

THE OUTLAW.

DEEP in the greenwood of my heart
My wild hounds race.
I cloak my soul at feast and mart,
I mask my face ;

Outlawed, but not alone, for Truth
Is outlawed too.
Proud world, you cannot banish us—
We banish you.

Go by, go by, with all your din,
Your dust, your greed, your guile,
Proud world, your thrones can never win—
From Her—one smile.

She sings to me in a lonely place,
She takes my hand.
I look into her lovely face
And understand . . .

Outlawed, but not alone, for Love
Is outlawed too.
You cannot banish us, proud world.
We banish you.

The Outlaw.

Now, which is outlawed, which alone ?
 Around us fall and rise
Murmurs of leaf and fern, the moan
 Of Paradise.

Outlawed ? Then hills and woods and streams
 Are outlawed too !
Proud world, from our immortal dreams,
 We banish you.

XII.

MOUNTAIN LAUREL.

(THE GREEN-MOUNTAIN POET SINGS.)

I HAVE been wandering in the lonely valleys,
Where mountain laurel grows ;
And, in among the rocks and the tall dark pine-trees
The foam of its young bloom flows,
In a riot of dawn-coloured stars, all drenched with
the dew-fall,
And musical with the bee.
Let the fog-bound cities over their dead wreaths
quarrel.
Wild laurel for me !

Wild laurel—mountain laurel—

*Bright as the breast of a cloud at break of day,
White-flowering laurel, wild mountain laurel,
Rose-dappled snowdrifts, warm with the honey of May !
On the happy hill-sides, in the green valleys of Con-
necticut,
Where the trout-streams go carolling to the sea,
I have laughed with the lovers of song and heard them
singing
“ Wild laurel for me ! ”*

Mountain Laurel.

Far, far away is the throng that has never known
beauty,
Or looked upon unstained skies.
Did they think that my songs would scramble for
withered bay-leaves
In the streets where the brown fog lies ?
They never have seen their wings, then, beating west-
ward,
To the heights where song is free,
To the hills where the laurel is drenched with the
dawn's own colours,
Wild laurel for me !

Wild laurel—mountain laurel—

*Where Robert o' Lincoln sings in the dawn and the
dew,*

White-flowering laurel—wild mountain laurel,

*Where song springs fresh from the heart, and the heart
is true !*

*They have gathered the sheep to their fold, but where is
the eagle ?*

*They have bridled their steeds, but when have they
tamed the sea ?*

*They have caged the wings, but never the heart of the
singer.*

" Wild laurel for me ! "

If I never should see you again, O, lost companions,
When the rose-red month begins,
With the wood-smoke curling blue by the Indian
river,
And the sound of the violins,

Mountain Laurel.

In dreams the breath of your green glens would still
haunt me,
Where night and her stars, drawing down on blossom and tree,
Turn earth to heaven, and whisper their love till
daybreak.
Wild laurel for me !

Wild laurel—mountain laurel—

*O, mount again, wild wings, to the stainless blue,
White-flowering laurel, wild mountain laurel,
And all the glory of song that the young heart knew.
I have lived. I have loved. I have sung in the happy
valleys,
Where the trout-streams go carolling to the sea.
I have met the lovers of song in the sunset bringing
“ Wild laurel for me ! ”*

XIII.

MEMORIES OF THE PACIFIC COAST.

I KNOW a sunset shore

Where warm keen incense on the sea-wind blows,
And dim blue ranches (while these March winds roar)
Drown to the roofs in heliotrope and rose ;

Deserts of lost delight,

Cactus and palm and earth of thirsty gold,
Dark purple blooms round eaves of sun-washed white,
And that Hesperian fruit men sought of old.

The exquisite drought of love

Throbs in that land, drought that forgoes the dew
And all its life-springs, that the boughs above
May bear the fruits for which it thirsts anew.

And those pure mountains rise

Behind it, shutting our sad world away,
With shadowy facets where the sunset dies,
And cliffs like amethyst at the close of day.

Memories of the Pacific Coast.

An arm's-length off they seem

At dawn, among the sage-brush ; but, at noon,
Their angel trails wind upward like a dream,
And their bright crests grow distant as the moon.

All day, from peaks of snow,

The dry ravines refresh their tawny drought,
Till, on the grey-green foot-hills, far below,
Like clusters of white grapes the lamps come out.

Then, breaths of orange-bloom

Drift over hushed white ranches on the plain,
And spires of eucalyptus cast their gloom
On brown adobe cloisters of old Spain.

There, green-tressed pepper grows,

In willowy trees that drop red tassels down,
And carpet the brown road with tints of rose
Between the palms that aisle the moon-white town.

Oh, to be wandering there,

Under the palm-trees, on that sunset shore,
Where the waves break in song, and the bright air
Is crystal-clean, and peace is ours once more.

There the lost wonder dwells,

Beauty, reborn in whiteness from the foam ;
There Youth returns with all its magic spells,
And the heart finds its long-forgotten home.

There, in that setting sun,

On soft white sand the great slow breaker falls.
There brood the huts where West and East are one,
And the strange air runs wild with elfin calls.

Memories of the Pacific Coast.

There, gazing far away,

Those brown-legged fisher-folk, with almond eyes,
Crouch by their nets, and through the rose-tinged spray
See their own Orient in those deepening skies.

Through fringes of the West,

They see the teeming East, beyond Japan,
Mother of races that, in age-long quest,
Have rounded earth, but end where they began ;

End in the strange recall

To that far childhood, that faint flowering past,
Where some dear shade, loved, lost, the first of all,
Opens the door to their dim home at last.

Home,—home ! Where is that land ?

Beyond the bounds of earth, the old hungering cry
Aches in the soul, drives us from all we planned,
And sets our sail to seek another sky.

XIV.

RED OF THE DAWN.

I.

THE Dawn peered in with blood-shot eyes
 Pressed close against the cracked old pane.
 The garret slept : the slow sad rain
Had ceased : grey fogs obscured the skies ;
But Dawn peered in with haggard eyes.

II.

All as last night ? The three-legged chair,
 The bare walls and the tattered bed,
 All !—but for those wild flakes of red
(And Dawn, perhaps, had splashed them there.)
Round the bare walls, the bed, the chair.

III.

'Twas here, last night, when winds were loud,
 A ragged singing-girl, she came
 Out of the tavern's glare and shame,
With some few pence—for she was proud—
Came home to sleep, when winds were loud.

Red of the Dawn.

IV.

And she sleeps well ; for she was tired.
That huddled shape beneath the sheet
With knees up-drawn, no wind or sleet
Can wake her now. Sleep she desired ;
And she sleeps well, for she was tired.

V.

And there was one that followed her
With some unhappy curse called " love " :
Last night, though winds beat loud above,
She shrank ! Hark, on the creaking stair,
What stealthy footstep followed her ?

VI.

But now the Curse, it seemed, had gone.
The small tin-box, wherein she hid
Old childish treasures, had burst its lid,
Dawn kissed her doll's cracked face. It shone
Red-smeared, but laughing—*the Curse is gone.*

VII.

So she sleeps well : she does not move ;
And on the wall, the chair, the bed,
Is it the Dawn that splashes red,
High as the text where *God is Love*
Hangs o'er her head ? She does not move.

Red of the Dawn.

VIII.

The clock dictates its old refrain :
 All else is quiet ; or, far away,
 Shaking the world with new-born day,
There thunders past some mighty train :
The clock dictates its old refrain.

IX.

The Dawn peers in with blood-shot eyes :
 The crust, the broken cup are there.
 She does not rise yet to prepare
Her scanty meal. God does not rise
 And pluck the blood-stained sheet from her ;
But Dawn peers in with haggard eyes.

XV.

GHOSTS.¹

O to creep in by candle-light,
 When all the world is fast asleep,
 Out of the cold winds, out of the night,
 Where the nettles wave and the rains weep !
 O, to creep in, lifting the latch
 So quietly that no soul could hear,
 And, at those embers in the gloom,
 Quietly light one careful match—
 You should not hear it, have no fear—
 And light the candle and look round
 The old familiar room ;
 To see the old books upon the wall
 And lovingly take one down again,
 And hear—O, strange to those that lay
 So patiently underground—
 The ticking of the clock, the sound
 Of clicking embers . . .
watch the play
 Of shadows . . .
till the implacable call
 Of morning turn our faces grey ;

¹ (First published in 1910.)

Ghosts.

And, or ever we go, we lift and kiss
Some idle thing that your hands may touch,
Some paper or book that your hands let fall,
And we never—when living—had cared so much
As to glance upon twice . . .

But now, O bliss
To kiss and to cherish it, moaning our pain,
Ere we creep to the silence again.

XVI.

TO A SUCCESSFUL MAN.

(WHAT THE GHOSTS SAID.)

AND after all the labour and the pains,
After the heaping up of gold on gold,
After success that locked your feet in chains,
And left you with a heart so tired and old,

Strange—is it not ?—to find your chief desire
Is what you might have had for nothing then—
The face of love beside a cottage fire
And friendly laughter with your fellow-men ?

You were so rich when fools esteemed you poor.
You ruled a field that kings could never buy :
The whisper of the sea was at your door,
And all those quiet stars were in your sky.

The nook of ferns below the breathless wood
Where one poor book could unlock Paradise. . . .
What will you give us now for that lost good ?
Better forget. You cannot pay the price.

You left them for the fame in which you trust.
But youth, and hope—did you forsake them too ?
Courage ! When dust at length returns to dust,
In your last dreams they may come back to you.

XVII.

IMMORTAL SAILS.

Now, in a breath, we'll burst those gates of gold,
And ransack heaven before our moment fails.
Now, in a breath, before we, too, grow old,
We'll mount and sing and spread immortal sails

It is not time that makes eternity.
Love and an hour may quite out-span the years,
And give us more to hear and more to see
Than life can wash away with all its tears.

Dear, when we part, at last, that sunset sky
Shall not be touched with deeper hues than this ;
But we shall ride the lightning ere we die
And seize our brief infinitude of bliss,

With time to spare for all that heaven can tell,
While eyes meet eyes, and look their last farewell.

XVIII.

THE LOST BATTLE.

It is not over yet—the fight
 Where those immortal dreamers failed.
 They stormed the citadels of night,
 And the night praised them—and prevailed.
 So long ago the cause was lost
 We scarce distinguish friend from foe ;
 But—if the dead can help it most—
 The armies of the dead will grow.

The world has all our banners now,
 And filched our watchwords for its own.
 The world has crowned the “ rebel’s ” brow
 And millions crowd his lordly throne.
 The masks have altered. Names are names.
 They praise the “ truth ” that is not true.
 The “ rebel ” that the world acclaims
 Is not the rebel Shelley knew.

We may not build that Commonweal.
 We may not reach the goal we set ;
 But there’s a flag they dare not steal.
 Forward ! It is not over yet.

The Lost Battle.

We shall be dust and under dust,
Before we end that ancient wrong ;
But there's a sword that cannot rust,
And where's the death can touch a song ?

So, when our bodies rot in earth,
The singing souls that once were ours,
Weaponed with light and helmed with mirth,
Shall front the kingdoms and the powers.
The ancient lie is on its throne,
And half the living still forget ;
But, since the dead are all our own,
Courage, it is not over yet.

XIX.

THE MAN THAT WAS A MULTITUDE.

As I came up to London, to buy my love a ring,
I passed by a tavern where the painted women sing.
Each of 'em was jigging on a greasy fiddler's knee,
And they cackled at the red rose my true love gave
to me ;

With their

*" Come and see the silly clown that wears a red rose !
Roses are green now, as everybody knows."*

They cackled (how they cackled !) crying everything
was new.

The old truths were all false, the new lies were true.
By play, by book, by poem, it was easier to say
A new thing, a false thing, than walk the stricter way.
Singing,

*" It was hard, hard to climb, when only truth was true ;
But all may violently run, down into the new."*

As I came home by Arundel, the wind blew off the sea.
It brought the almond scent of gorse, and there she
came to me,
My true love with the young light that gloried in her
eyes,
And my soul rose like a giant to the ancient ordered
skies,

The Man that was a Multitude.

Laughing,
*Let 'em take their green rose, and pickle it in hell,
For I have seen the red rose that blows by Arundel.*

My soul rose like a giant, and O but it was sweet
To tumble all its passion like a wave at her feet ;
To leave their tricks behind me, and to find myself
again
Walking in the clean sun along a Sussex lane,
Singing,
*Let 'em hymn their new love that veers with heat and
cold,
But I will sing the true love that never shall grow old.*

Then, as we walked together, I was quietly aware
Of a mighty throng around us in the hawthorn-
scented air,
And I knew it was the simple folk that wait and listen
long,
Ere the soul that makes a nation can unite them in
a song.
Then,
*" Back," they sang, " to London-town ; and we will march
with you ;
Because we like the red rose that Eden Garden knew.*

" But Satan had a vision five-and-thirty years ago,
When England lost the great faith and dwarfs began
to grow.
He whistled up his wicked gnomes, from all the nooks
of night,
And set 'em to the new trick of proving black is white.

The Man that was a Multitude.

Crying,
*Come, my 'intellectuals.' Trample on the dead.
Trample truth into the dust, and throne yourselves
instead."*

And so it was that rebel imps, in sooty reds and blues,
And little squint-eyed epigrams with scorpions in
their shoes,
And white-hot cinders in their breeks to make 'em
act like youth,
Came hopping on their hands from hell, to dance upon
the truth,
Squeaking,
*"All that you have ever dreamed is ashes now and dust.
God's a force—like heat, we think—and love is only lust."*

And some would take to poetry, and roll each other's
logs ;
But, since their throats were crooked, they could only
croak like frogs.
And some would take to sculpture, and the naked
Venus died,
As they showed their blocks of marble and declared
she slept inside.
Ay,
*And others painted pictures like the stern of a baboon :
While their fiddlers, by the tavern, fiddled songs without
a tune.*

And there we found 'em boasting, " We have mingled
earth and sea,
We have planted tare and hemlock where the harvest
used to be.

The Man that was a Multitude.

We have broken all the borders, we have neither chart
nor plan."

Then they saw the throng approaching, and behold it
was a Man,

Chuckling,

*"England waits and suffers long, as nations often do,
But the Man that is a Multitude has come to answer you."*

His head was in the heavens, though his feet were in
the clay.

He rose against the smoke of stars we call the Milky
Way.

Three hundred thousand oak-trees had furnished forth
his staff ;

And he waved his club above them, as a child might,
with a laugh.

Saying,

*"You have sung a strange song, in God's good land !
Who shall deliver you, or save you from my hand ?*

"O, you have sung a new song, but I will sing an old,
And it shall shine like rubies, and it shall ring like
gold !

And you have sung the little songs of mating flea
and flea ;

But I will sing the great song that thunders like the
sea ; "

Roaring,

*"You have sung the red grass, and hymned the purple
cow ;*

*And you have asked for justice ! Will you kneel and
have it now ? "*

The Man that was a Multitude.

"We're only Intellectuals," a tiny fiddler squeaked.

"It's not on such as us, you know, that judgment should be wreaked.

Why, even Mr Trotsky says, we've hardly helped at all !

We only scratched the mortar out. We didn't smash the wall.

No ! No !

We only thought the reign of law a very poor device.

We only asked for freedom, in a monkeys' paradise."

The Man that was a Multitude, he dropped his mighty staff.

"Why, damn your little eyes," he said, "I'm only going to laugh."

Then, once, and twice, he guffawed, as a Sussex ploughman might,

And the fiddlers and their fancies flew like feathers thro' the night,

Whimpering,

"Is it a Victorian Ghost ? Some one that we know ?

Ecclefechan Tom himself—could hardly treat us so !"

As I came home by Arundel, my true love walked with me,

And the Man that was a Multitude was singing like the sea,—

O, they have sung their green rose, and pickled it in hell !

But we will sing the red rose that Adam used to smell.

And,

They have sung their new love that veers with heat and cold ;

But we will sing the true love that never shall grow old.

XX.

THE LORD OF MISRULE.

"On May-days the wild heads of the parish would choose a Lord of Misrule, whom they would follow even into the church, though the minister were at prayer or preaching, dancing and swinging their may-boughs about like devils incarnate."—*Old Puritan Writer*.

ALL on a fresh May morning, I took my love to church,
To see if Parson Primrose were safely on his perch.
He scarce had won to *Thirldy*, or squire begun to
snore,

When, like a sun-lit sea-wave,
A green and crimson sea-wave,
A frolic of madcap May-folk came whooping through
the door :—

Come up, come in with streamers !
Come in with boughs of may !
Come up and thump the sexton,
And carry the clerk away.
Now skip like rams, ye mountains,
Ye little hills, like sheep !
Come up and wake the people
That parson puts to sleep.

The Lord of Misrule.

They tickled their nut-brown tabors. Their garlands
flew in showers,
And lasses and lads came after them, with feet like
dancing flowers.
Their queen had torn her green gown, and bared a
shoulder as white,
O, white as the may that crowned her,
While all the minstrels round her
Tilted back their crimson hats and sang for sheer
delight :

Come up, come in with streamers !
Come in, with boughs of may !
Now by the gold upon your toe
You walked the primrose way.
Come up, with white and crimson !
- O, shake your bells and sing ;
Let the porch bend, the pillars bow,
Before our Lord, the Spring !

The dusty velvet hassocks were dabbled with fragrant
dew.
The font grew white with hawthorn, it frothed in
every pew.
Three petals clung to the sexton's beard as he mopped
and mowed at the clerk,
And " Take that sexton away," they cried ;
" Did Nebuchadnezzar eat may ? " they
cried.
" Nay, that was a prize from Betty," they cried, " for
kissing her in the dark."

The Lord of Misrule.

Come up, come in with streamers !
Come in, with boughs of may !
Who knows but old Methuselah
May hobble the green-wood way ?
If Betty could kiss the sexton,
If Kitty could kiss the clerk,
Who knows how Parson Primrose
Might blossom in the dark ?

The congregation spluttered. The squire grew purple
and all,
And every little chorister bestrode his carven stall.
The parson flapped like a magpie, but none could hear
his prayers ;
For Tom Fool flourished his tabor,
Flourished his nut-brown tabor,
Bashed the head of the sexton, and stormed the pulpit
stairs.

High in the old oak pulpit
This Lord of all mis-rule—
I think it was Will Summers
That once was Shakespeare's fool—
Held up his hand for silence,
And all the church grew still :
“ And are you snoring yet,” he said,
“ Or have you slept your fill ?

“ Your God still walks in Eden, between the ancient
trees,
Where Youth and Love go wading through pools of
primroses.

The Lord of Misrule.

And this is the sign we bring you, before the darkness
fall,

That Spring is risen, is risen again,
That Life is risen, is risen again,
That Love is risen, is risen again, and Love is Lord of
all."

At Paske began our morrice
And ere Pentecost our May ;
Because, albeit your words be true,
You know not what you say.
You chatter in church like jackdaws,
Words that would wake the dead,
Were there one breath of life in you,
One drop of blood, he said.

He died and He went down to hell ! You know not
what you mean.

Our rafters were of green fir. Also our beds were
green.

But out of the mouth of a fool, a fool, before the
darkness fall,

We tell you He is risen again,
The Lord of Life is risen again,
The boughs put forth their tender buds, and Love is
Lord of all !

He bowed his head. He stood so still,
They bowed their heads as well.
And softly from the organ-loft
The song began to swell.

The Lord of Misrule.

*Come up with blood-red streamers,
The reeds began the strain.
The vox humana pealed on high,
The spring is risen again !*

*The vox angelica replied—The shadows flee away !
Our house-beams were of cedar. Come in, with boughs
of may !
The diapason deepened it—Before the darkness fall,
We tell you He is risen again !
Our God hath burst His prison again !
The Lord of Life is risen again ; and Love is Lord of all.*

XXI.

PSYCHE.

As constant lovers may rejoice
 With seas between, with worlds between,
Because a fragrance and a voice
 Are round them everywhere :
So let me travel to the grave,
 Believing still—for I have seen—
That Love's triumphant banners wave
 Beyond my own despair.

I have no trust in my own worth ;
 Yet have I faith, O love, for you,
That every beauty in bloom or leaf,
 That even age and wrong
May touch, may hurt you, on this earth,
 But only, only as kisses do ;
Or as the fretted string of grief
 Completes the bliss of song.

That you shall see, on any grave
 The snow fall, like that unseen hand
Which O, so often, pressed your hair
 To cherish and console :

Psyche.

That seas may roar and winds rave,
But you shall feel and understand
What vast caresses everywhere
Convey you to the goal.

So was it always in the years
When Love began, when Love began
With eyes that were not touched of tears
And lips that still could sing—
And all around us, in the May,
The child-god with his laughter ran,
And every bloom, on every spray,
Betrayed his fluttering wing.

So hold it, keep it, count it, sweet,
Until the end, until the end.
It is not cruelty, but bliss
That pains and is so fond :
Crush life like thyme beneath your feet,
And O, my love, when that strange friend,
The Shadow of Wings, which men call Death,
Shall close your eyes, with that last kiss,
Ask not His name. A rosier breath
Shall waken you—beyond.

XXII.

CREATION.

IN the beginning, there was nought
But heaven, one Majesty of Light,
Beyond all speech, beyond all thought,
Beyond all depth, beyond all height,
Consummate heaven, the first and last,
Enfolding in its perfect prime
No future rushing to the past,
But one rapt Now, that knew not Space or Time.

Formless it was, being gold on gold,
And void—but with that complete Life
Where music could no wings unfold
Till lo, God smote the strings of strife !
“ Myself unto Myself am Throne,
Myself unto Myself am Thrall,
I that am All am all alone,”
He said, “ Yea, I have nothing, having all.”

And, gathering round His mount of bliss
The angel-squadrons of His will,
He said, “ One battle yet there is
To win, one vision to fulfil ;

Creation.

Since heaven where'er I gaze expands,
And power that knows no strife or cry,
Weakness shall bind and pierce My hands
And make a world for Me wherein to die.

All might, all vastness and all glory
Being Mine, I must descend and make
Out of My heart a song, a story
Of little hearts that burn and break ;
Out of My passion without end
I will make little azure seas,
And into small sad fields descend
And make green grass, white daisies, rustling trees.'

Then shrank His angels, knowing He thrust
His arms out East and West and gave
For every little dream of dust
Part of His Life as to a grave.
' *Enough, O Father, for Thy words*
Have pierced Thy hands ! ' But, low and sweet,
He said ' Sunsets and streams and birds,
And drifting clouds ! '—The purple stained His
feet.—

' Enough ! ' His angels moaned in fear,
' *Father, Thy words have pierced Thy side !* '
He whispered, ' Roses shall grow there,
And there must be a hawthorn-tide,
And ferns, dewy at dawn,' and still
They moaned—*Enough, the red drops bleed !*
' And,' sweet and low, ' on every hill,'
He said, ' I will have flocks and lambs to lead.'

Creation.

His angels bowed their heads beneath

Their wings till that great pang was gone ;

Pour not Thy soul out unto Death !

They moaned, and still His Love flowed on,

“ There shall be small white wings to stray

From bliss to bliss, from bloom to bloom,

And blue flowers in the wheat ; and—” ‘ *Stay !*

Speak not,’ they cried, ‘ *the word that seals Thy tomb !*’

He spake—“ I have thought of a little child

That I will have there to embark

On small adventures in the wild,

And front slight perils in the dark ;

And I will hide from him and lure

His laughing eyes with suns and moons,

And rainbows that shall not endure ;

And—when he is weary sing him drowsy tunes.”

His angels fell before Him weeping.

‘ *Enough ! Tempt not the Gates of Hell !*’

He said, ‘ His soul is in his keeping

That we may love each other well,

And lest the dark too much affright him,

I will strow countless little stars

Across his childish skies to light him

That he may wage in peace his mimic wars ;

And oft forget Me as he plays

With swords and childish merchandize,

Or with his elfin balance weighs,

Or with his foot-rule metes, the skies ;

Creation.

Or builds his castles by the deep,
Or tunnels through the rocks, and then—
Turn to Me as he falls asleep,
And, in his dreams, feel for My hand again.

And when he is older he shall be
My friend and walk here at My side ;
Or—when he wills—grow young with Me,
And, to that happy world where once we died,
Descending through the calm blue weather,
Buy life once more with our immortal breath,
And wander through the little fields together,
And taste of Love and Death.'

XXIII.

FROM "VICTORY."

I.

Love that still holds us with immortal power,
Yet cannot lift us to His realm of light ;
Love that still shows us heaven for one brief hour
Only to daunt the heart with that sheer height ;

Love that is made of loveliness entire
In form and thought and act ; and still must
shame us
Because we ever acknowledge and aspire,
And yet let slip the shining hands that claim us.

O, if this Love might cloak with rags His glory,
Laugh, eat and drink, and dwell with suffering men,
Sit with us at our hearth, and hear our story,
This world—we thought—might be transfigured
then.

" But O," Love answered, with swift human tears,
" All these things have I done, these many years."

II.

" This day," Love said, " if ye will hear my voice,
I mount and sing with birds in all your skies.
I am the soul that calls you to rejoice,
And every wayside flower is my disguise.

From "Victory."

Look closely. Are the wings too wide for pity ?

Look closely. Do these tender hues betray ?

How often have I sought my Holy City ?

How often have ye turned your hearts away ?

Is there not healing in the beauty I bring you ?

Am I not whispering in green leaves and rain,

Singing in all that woods and seas can sing you ?

Look, once, on Love, and earth is heaven again.

O, did your Spring but once a century waken,

The heaven of heavens for this would be forsaken."

III

There's but one gift that all our dead desire,

One gift that men can give, and that's a dream,

Unless we, too, can burn with that same fire

Of sacrifice ; die to the things that seem ;

Die to the little hatreds ; die to greed ;

Die to the old ignoble selves we knew ;

Die to the base contempts of sect and creed,

And rise again, like these, with souls as true.

Nay (since these died before their task was finished),

Attempt new heights, bring even their dreams to
birth,

Build us that better world, O, not diminished

By one true splendour that they planned on earth.

And that's not done by sword, or tongue, or pen,

There's but one way. God make us better men.

XXIV.

LYRICS FROM "THE BURIAL OF A QUEEN."

I.

Dulce ridentem, laughing through the ages,
 Dulce loquentem, O, fairer far to me,
Rarer than the wisdom of all his golden pages
 Floats the happy laughter of his vanished Lalage.

II.

Dulce loquentem,—we hear it and we know it !
 Dulce ridentem,—so musical and low !
" Mightier than marble is my song ! " Ah, did the
 poet
 Know why little Lalage was mightier even so ?

III.

Dulce ridentem—thro' all the years that sever,
 Clear as o'er yon hawthorn-hedge we heard her
 passing by—
Lalagen amabo—a song may live for ever !—
 Dulce loquentem, but Lalage must die.

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

As I went by the cattle-shed

The grey dew dimmed the grass,

And, under a twisted apple-tree,

Old Robin Scarlet stood by me.

"Keep watch! Keep watch to-night," he said,

"There's things 'ull come to pass.

"Keep watch until the moon has cleared

The thatch of yonder rick ;

Then I'll come out of my cottage-door

To wait for the coach of a queen once more ;

And—you'll say nothing of what you've heard,

But rise and follow me quick."

"And what 'ull I see if I keep your trust,

And wait and watch so late ? "

"Pride," he said, "and Pomp," he said,

"Beauty to haunt you till you're dead,

And Glorious Dust that goes to dust,

Passing the white farm-gate.

"You are young and all for adventure, lad,

And the great tales to be told :

This night, before the clock strike one,

Your lordliest hour will all be done ;

But you'll remember it and be glad,

In the days when you are old ! "

All in the middle of the night

My face was at the pane ;

When, creeping out of his cottage-door,

To wait for the coach of a queen once more,

Old Scarlet, in the moon-light,

Beckoned to me again.

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,
Like Father Time for dole,
In Reading Tawny cloak and hood,
With mattock and with spade he stood,
And, far away to southward,
A bell began to toll.

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,
And never a word he said ;
But, as I stole out of the house,
He pointed over the orchard boughs,
Where, not with dawn or sunset,
The Northern sky grew red.

I followed him, and half in fear,
To the old farm-gate again ;
And, round the curve of the long white road,
I saw that the dew-dashed hedges glowed
Red with the grandeur drawing near,
And the torches of her train.

They carried her down with singing,
With singing sweet and low,
Slowly round the curve they came,
Twenty torches dropping flame,
The heralds that were bringing her
The way we all must go.

'Twas master William Dethick,
The Garter King of Arms,
Before her royal coach did ride,
With none to see his Coat of Pride,
For peace was on the country-side,
And sleep upon the farms ;

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

Peace upon the red farm,
Peace upon the grey,
Peace on the heavy orchard trees,
And little white-walled cottages,
Peace upon the wayside,
And sleep upon the way.

So master William Dethick,
With forty horse and men,
Like any common man and mean
Rode on before the Queen, the Queen,
And—only a wandering pedlar
Could tell the tale again.

How, like a cloud of darkness,
Between the torches moved
Four black steeds and a velvet pall
Crowned with the Crown Imperiall,
And—on her shield—the lilies,
The lilies that she loved.

Ah, stained and ever stainless,
Ah, white as her own hand,
White as the wonder of that brow,
Crowned with colder lilies now,
White on the velvet darkness,
The lilies of her land !

The witch from over the water,
The fay from over the foam,
The bride that rode thro' Edinbro' town
With satin shoes and a silken gown,
A queen, and a great king's daughter,—
Thus they carried her home,

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

With torches and with scutcheons,
Unhonoured and unseen,
With the lilies of France in the wind a-stir,
And the Lion of Scotland over her,
Darkly, in the dead of night,
They carried the Queen, the Queen !

I.

Though thy hands have plied their trade
Eighty years without a rest,
Robin Scarlet, never thy spade
Built a house for such a guest !
Carry her where, in earliest June,
All the whitest hawthorns blow.
Carry her under the midnight moon,
Singing very soft and low.
Slow between the low green larches, carry the lovely
lady sleeping,
Past the low white moon-lit farms, along the lilac-
shadowed way !
Carry her through the summer darkness, weeping,
weeping, weeping, weeping !
Answering only, to any that ask you, whence ye
carry her,—*Fotheringhay* !

II.

She was gayer than a child !
—*Let your torches droop for sorrow.*
Laughter in her eyes ran wild !
—*Carry her down to Peterboro'.*—

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

Words were kisses in her mouth !

—*Let no word of blame be spoken.*—

She was Queen of all the South !

—*In the North, her heart was broken.*—

They should have left her in her vineyards, left her
heart to her land's own keeping,

Left her white breast room to breathe, and left
her light foot free to dance.

Out of the cold grey northern mists, we carry her
weeping, weeping, weeping,—

O, ma patrie,

La plus chérie,

Adieu, plaisant pays de France !

III.

Many a red heart died to beat

—*Music swelled in Holyrood !*—

Once, beneath her fair white feet.

—*Now the floors may rot with blood*—

She was young and her deep hair—

—*Wind and rain were all her fate !*—

Trapped young Love as in a snare.

—*And the wind's a sword in the Ganongate !*

Edinboro' !

Edinboro' !

*Music built the towers of Troy, but thy grey walls are
built of sorrow !*

Wind-swept hills, and sorrowful glens, of thrifty
sowing and iron reaping,

What if her foot were fair as a sunbeam, how
should it touch or melt your snows ?

What if her hair were a silken mesh ?

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

Hands of steel can deal hard blows,
Iron breast-plates bruise fair flesh !
Carry her southward, palled in purple,
Weeping, weeping, weeping, weeping,
What had their rocks to do with roses ? Body and
soul she was all one rose ?

IV.

Douglas in the moonless night
—*Muffled oars on blue Loch Leven*—
Took her hand, a flake of white
—*Beauty slides the bolts of Heaven* !—
Little white hand, like a flake of snow,
When they saw it, his Highland crew
Swung together, and murmured low,
Douglas, wilt *thou* die, then, too ?
And the pine-trees whispered, weeping,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true !

" Little white hand like a tender moon-beam, soon
shall you set the broadswords leaping !
It is the Queen ! the Queen ! " they whispered,
watching her soar to the saddle anew :
" There will be trumpets blown in the mountains, a
mist of blood on the heather, and weeping,
Weeping, weeping, and thou, too, dead for her,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true ? "

V.

Carry the queenly lass along !
—*Gold she lies, cold and dead,*—

Lyrics from "The Burial of a Queen."

She whose laughter was a song,
—*Lapped around with sheets of lead!*—
She whose blood was wine of the South,
—*Light her down to a couch of clay!*—
And a royal rose her mouth,
And her body made of may!
—*Lift your torches weeping, weeping,*
Light her down to a couch of clay.

They should have left her in her vineyards, left her
heart to her land's own keeping,
Left her white breast room to breathe, and left
her light foot free to dance!
Hush! Between the solemn pine-woods, carry the
lovely lady sleeping,
Out of the cold grey Northern mists, with banner
and scutcheon, plume and lance,
Carry her southward, palled in purple, weeping,
weeping, weeping, weeping,—
O, ma patrie
La plus chérie,
Adieu, plaisant pays de France.

XXV.

THE SIGN OF THE GOLDEN SHOE.

A BRAZIER smouldered in the door to keep
The Plague away. The Mermaid reeked with smoke
Of scented woods. Nash crept into the room
Shivering like a fragment of the night,
His face yellow as parchment, and his eyes
Burning.

“The Plague! He has taken it!” voices cried.
“That’s not the Plague! The old carrion-crow is
drunk;
But stand away. What ails you, Nash, my lad?”
Then, through the clamour, as through a storm at
sea,
The master’s voice, the voice of Ben, rang out,
“Nash!”

Ben leapt to his feet, and like a ship
Shouldering the waves, he shouldered the throng
aside.

“What ails you, man? What’s that upon your
breast?
Blood!”

“Marlowe is dead,” said Nash,
And stunned the room to silence. . . .

“Marlowe—dead!”
Ben caught him by the shoulders. “Nash! Awake!

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

What do you mean? Marlowe? Kit Marlowe?
Dead?

I supped with him—why—not three nights ago!
You are drunk! You are dazed! There's blood
upon your coat!"

"That's—where he died," said Nash, and suddenly
sank

Sidelong across a bench, bowing his head
Between his hands. . . .

Wept, I believe. Then, like a whip of steel,
His lean black figure sprang erect again.

"Marlowe!" he cried, "Kit Marlowe, killed for a
punk,

A taffeta petticoat! Killed by an apple-squire!
Drunk? I was drunk; but I am sober now,
Sober enough, by God! Poor Kit is dead."

.
The Mermaid Inn was thronged for many a night
With startled faces. Voices rose and fell,
As I recall them, in a great vague dream,
Curious, pitiful, angry, thrashing out
The tragic truth. Then, all along the Cheape,
The ballad-mongers waved their sheets of rhyme,
Croaking: *Come buy! Come buy! The bloody death
Of Wormall, writ by Master Richard Bame!*
Come buy! Come buy! The Atheist's Tragedy.
And, even in Bread Street, at our very door,
The crowder to his cracked old fiddle sang:—

*"He was a poet of proud repute
And wrote full many a play,
Now strutting in a silken suit,
Now begging by the way."*

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Then, out of the hubbub and the clash of tongues,
The bawdy tales and scraps of balladry,
(As out of chaos rose the slow round world)
At last, though for the Mermaid Inn alone,
Emerged some tragic semblance of a soul,
Some semblance of the rounded truth, a world
Glimpsed only through great mists of blood and
tears,
Yet smitten, here and there, with dreadful light,
As I believe, from heaven.

Strangely enough,
(Though Ben forgot his pipe and Will's deep eyes
Deepened and softened, when they spoke of Kit,
For many a month thereafter) it was Nash
That took the blow like steel into his heart.
Nash, our "Piers Penniless," whom Rob Greene had
called
"Young Juvenal," the first satirist of our age,
Nash, of the biting tongue and subtle sneer,
Brooded upon it, till his grief became
Sharp as a rapier, ready to lunge in hate
At all the lies of shallower hearts.

One night,
The night he raised the mists from that wild world,
He talked with Chapman in the Mermaid Inn
Of Marlowe's poem that was left half-sung,
His *Hero and Leander*,

"Kit desired,
If he died first, that you should finish it,"
Said Nash.

A loaded silence filled the room
As with the imminent spirit of the dead
Listening. And long that picture haunted me :

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Nash, like a lithe young Mephistopheles
Leaning between the silver candle-sticks,
Across the oak table, with his keen white face,
Dark smouldering eyes, and black, dishevelled hair ;
Chapman, with something of the steady strength
That helms our ships, and something of the Greek,
The cool clear passion of Platonic thought
Behind the fringe of his Olympian beard
And broad Homeric brows, confronting him
Gravely.

There was a burden of mystery
Brooding on all that night ; and, when at last
Chapman replied, I knew he felt it, too.
The curious pedantry of his wonted speech
Was charged with living undertones, like truths
Too strange and too tremendous to be breathed
Save thro' a mask. And though, in lines that flamed
Once with strange rivalry, Shakespeare himself defied
Chapman, that spirit " by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch," Will's nimbler sense
Was quick to breathings from beyond our world
And could not hold them lightly.

" Ah, then Kit,"
Said Chapman, " had some prescience of his end,
Like many another dreamer. What strange hints
Of things past, present, and to come, there lie
Sealed in the magic pages of that music
Which, laying strong hold on universal laws,
Ranges beyond these mud-walls of the flesh,
Though dull wits fail to follow. It was this
That made men find an oracle in the books
Of Vergil, and an everlasting fount
Of science in the prophets."

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Once again
That haunted silence filled the shadowy room ;
And, far away up Bread Street, we could hear
The crowder, piping of black Wormall still :—

*“ He had a friend, once gay and green,
Who died of want alone,
In whose black fate he might have seen
The warning of his own.”*

“ Strange he should ask a hod-man like myself
To crown that miracle of his April day,”
Said Chapman, murmuring softly under breath,
“ Amorous Leander, beautiful and young . . .
Why, Nash, had I been only charged to raise
Out of its grave in the green Hellespont
The body of that boy,
To make him sparkle and leap thro’ the cold waves
And fold young Hero to his heart again,
The task were scarce as hard.

But . . . stranger still,”—
And his next words, although I hardly knew
All that he meant, went tingling through my flesh—
“ Before you spoke, before I knew his wish,
I had begun to write !

I knew and loved
His work. Himself I hardly knew at all ;
And yet—I know him now ! I have heard him now
And, since he pledged me in so rare a cup,
I’ll lift and drink to him, though lightnings fall
From envious gods to scourge me. I will lift
This cup in darkness to the soul that reigns
In light on Helicon. Who knows how near ?

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

For I have thought, sometimes, when I have tried
To work his will, the hand that moved my pen
Was mine, and yet—not mine. The bodily mask
Is mine, and sometimes, dull as clay, it sleeps
With old Musæus. Then strange flashes come,
Oracular glories, visionary gleams,
And the mask moves, not of itself, and sings.”

“ I know that thought,” said Nash. “ A mighty
ship,
A lightning-shattered wreck, out in that night,
Unseen, has foundered thundering. We sit here
Snug on the shore, and feel the wash of it,
The widening circles running to our feet.
Can such a soul go down to glut the sharks
Without one ripple? Here comes one sprinkle of
spray.
Listen ! ” And through that night, quick and intense,
And hushed for thunder, tingled once again,
Like a thin wire, the crowder’s distant tune :—

*“ Had he been prenticed to the trade
His father followed still,
This exit he had never made,
Nor played a part so ill.”*

“ Here is another,” said Nash, “ I know not why ;
But like a weed in the long wash, I too
Was moved, not of myself, to a tune like this.
O, I can play the crowder, fiddle a song
On a dead friend, with any the best of you,
Lie and kick heels in the sun on a dead man’s grave.
And yet—God knows—it is the best we can ;
And better than the world’s way, to forget.”

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

So saying, like one that murmurs happy words
To torture his own grief, half in self-scorn,
He breathed a scrap of balladry that raised
The mists a moment from that Paradise,
That primal world of innocence, where Kit
In childhood played, outside his father's shop,
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*, as thus :—

A cobbler lived in Canterbury
—He is dead now, poor soul !—
He sat at his door and stitched in the sun,
Nodding and smiling at everyone ;
For St Hugh makes all good cobblers merry,
And often he sang as the pilgrims passed,
“ I can hammer a soldier's boot,
And daintily glove a dainty foot.
Many a sandal from my hand
Has walked the road to Holy Land.
Knights may fight for me, priests may pray for me,
Pilgrims walk the pilgrim's way for me,
I have a work in the world to do !
—*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*
 To good St Hugh !—
The cobbler must stick to his last.”

And anon he would cry
“ Kit ! Kit ! Kit ! ” to his little son,
“ Look at the pilgrims riding by !
Dance down, hop down, after them, run ! ”
Then, like an unfledged linnet, out
Would tumble the brave little lad,
With a piping shout,—

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

" O, look at them, look at them, look at them, Dad !
Priest and prioress, abbot and friar,
Soldier and seaman, knight and squire !
How many countries have they seen ?
Is there a king there, is there a queen ?
Dad, one day,
Thou and I must ride like this,
All along the Pilgrim's Way,
By Glastonbury and Samarcand,
El Dorado and Cathay,
London and Persepolis,
All the way to Holy Land ! "

Then, shaking his head as if he knew,
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*,
Touched by the glow of the setting sun,
While the pilgrims passed,
The little cobbler would laugh and say :
" When you are old you will understand
'Tis a very long way
To Samarcand !
Why, largely to exaggerate
Befits not men of small estate,
But—I should say, yes, I should say,
'Tis a hundred miles from where you stand ;
And a hundred more, my little son,
A hundred more, to Holy Land ! . . .
I have a work in the world to do
—*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*
 To good St Hugh !—
The cobbler must stick to his last."
" Which last," said Nash, breaking his rhyme off short,
" The crowder, after his kind, would seem to approve.

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Well—all the waves from that great wreck out there
Break, and are lost in one with-drawing sigh :

The little lad that used to play
Around the cobbler's door,
Kit Marlowe, Kit Marlowe,
We shall not see him more.

But—could I tell you how that galleon sank,
Could I but bring you to that hollow whirl,
The black gulf in mid-ocean, where that wreck
Went thundering down, and round it hell still roars,
That were a tale to snap all fiddle-strings.”
“ Tell me,” said Chapman.

“ Ah, you wondered why,”
Said Nash, “ you wondered why he asked your help
To crown that work of his. Why, Chapman, think,
Think of the cobbler's awl—there's a stout lance
To couch at London, there's a conquering point
To carry in triumph through Persepolis !
I tell you Kit was nothing but a child,
When some rich patron of the *Golden Shoe*
Beheld him riding into Samarcand
Upon a broken chair, the which he said
Was a white steed, splashed with the blood of kings.

When, on that patron's bounty, he did ride
So far as Cambridge, he was a brave lad,
Untamed, adventurous, but still innocent,
O, innocent as the cobbler's little self !
He brought to London just a bundle and stick,
A slender purse, an Ovid, a few scraps
Of song, and all unshielded, all unarmed,

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

A child's heart, packed with splendid hopes and dreams.

I say a child's heart, Chapman, and that phrase
Crowns, not dis-crowns, his manhood.

Well—he turned

An honest penny, taking some small part
In plays at the *Red Bull*. And, all the while,
Beyond the paint and tinsel of the stage,
Beyond the greasy cock-pit with its reek
Of orange-peel and civet, as all of these
Were but the clay churned by the glorious rush
Of his white chariots and his burning steeds,
Nay, as the clay were a shadow, his great dreams,
Like bannered legions on some proud crusade,
Empurpling all the deserts of the world,
Swept on in triumph to the glittering towers
Of his abiding City.

Then—he met

That damned blood-sucking cockatrice, the pug
Of some fine strutting mummer, one of those plagues
Bred by our stage, a puff-ball on the hill
Of Helicon. As for his wench—she too
Had played so many parts that she forgot
The cue for truth. King Puff had taught her well.
He was the vainer and more foolish thing,
She the more poisonous.

One dark day, to spite

Archer, her latest paramour, a friend
And apple-squire to Puff, she set her eyes
On Marlowe . . . feigned a joy in his young art,
Murmured his songs, used all her London tricks
To coney-catch the country green-horn. Man,
Kit never even *saw* her painted face !

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

He pored on books by candle-light and saw
Everything thro' a mist. O, I could laugh
To think of it, only—his up-turned skull
There, in the dark, now that the flesh drops off,
Has laughed enough, a horrible silent laugh,
To think his Angel of Light was, after all,
Only the red-lipped Angel of the Plague.
He was no better than the rest of us,
No worse. He felt the heat. He felt the cold.
He took her down to Deptford to escape
Contagion, and the crashing of sexton's spades
On dead men's bones in every churchyard round ;
The jangling bell and the cry, *Bring out your dead.*
And there she told him of her luckless life,
Wedded, deserted, both against her will,
A luckless Eve that never knew the snake.
True and half-true she mixed in one wild lie,
And then—she caught him by the hand and wept.
No death-cart passed to warn him with its bell.
Her eyes, her perfumed hair, and her red mouth,
Her warm white breast, her civet-scented skin,
Swimming before him, in a piteous mist,
Made the lad drunk, and—she was in his arms ;
And all that God had meant to wake one day
Under the Sun of Love, suddenly woke
By candle-light and cried ' The Sun ! The Sun ! '
And he believed it, Chapman, he believed it !
He was a cobbler's son, and he believed
In Love ! Blind, through that mist he caught at Love,
The everlasting King of all this world.

Kit was not clever. Clever men—like Pomp—
Might jest. And fools might laugh. But when a man,

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Simple as all great elemental things,
Makes his whole heart a sacrificial fire
To one whose love is in her supple skin,
There comes a laughter in which jests break up
Like icebergs in a sea of burning marl.
Then dreamers turn to murderers in an hour.
Then topless towers are burnt, and the Ocean-sea
Tramples the proud fleet, down, into the dark,
And sweeps over it, laughing. Come and see,
The heart now of this darkness—no more waves,
But the black central hollow where that wreck
Went down for ever.

How should Piers Penniless
Brand that wild picture on the world's black heart ?-
Last night I tried the way of the Florentine,
And bruised myself ; but we are friends together
Mourning a dead friend, none will ever know !—
Kit, do you smile at poor Piers Penniless,
Measuring it out ? Ah, boy, it is my best !
Since hearts must beat, let it be *terza rima*,
A ladder of rhyme that two sad friends alone
May let down, thus, to the last circle of hell."

So saying, and motionless as a man in trance,
Nash breathed the words that raised the veil anew,
Strange intervolving words which, as he spake them
Moved like the huge slow whirlpool of that pit
Where the wreck sank, the serpentine slow folds
Of the lewd Kraken that sucked it, shuddering, down :-

This is the Deptford Inn. Climb the dark stair.
Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead !
See, on the table, by that broken chair,

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

The little phials of paint—the white and red.

A cut-lawn kerchief hangs behind the door,
Left by his punk, even as the tapster said.

There is the gold-fringed taffeta gown she wore,

And, on that wine-stained bed, as is most meet,
He lies alone never to waken more.

O, still as chiselled marble, the frayed sheet

Folds the still form on that sepulchral bed,
Hides the dead face, and peaks the rigid feet.

Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead !

Draw back the sheet, ah, tenderly lay bare
The splendour of that Apollonian head ;

The gloriolate of his flame-coloured hair ;

The lean athletic body, deftly planned
To carry that swift soul of fire and air ;

The long thin flanks, the broad breast, and the grand

Heroic shoulders ! Look, what lost dreams lie
Cold in the fingers of that delicate hand ;

And, shut within those lyric lips, what cry

Of unborn beauty, sunk in utter night,
Lost worlds of song, sealed in an unknown sky,

Never to be brought forth, clothed on with light.

Was this, then, this the secret of his song ?—
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight ?

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

It was not Love, not Love, that wrought this wrong ;
And yet—what evil shadow of this dark town
Could quench a soul so flame-like clean and strong,

Strike the young glory of his manhood down,
Dead, like a dog, dead in a drunken brawl,
Dead for a phial of paint, a taffeta gown ?

What if his blood were hot ? High over all
He heard, as in his song the world still hears,
Those angels on the burning heavenly wall

Who chant the thunder-music of the spheres.
Yet—through the glory of his own young dream
Here did he meet that face, wet with strange tears,

Andromeda, with piteous face astream,
Hailing him, Perseus. In her treacherous eyes
As in dark pools the mirrored stars will gleam,

Here did he see his own eternal skies ;
And here—she laughed, nor found the dream amiss,
But bade him pluck and eat—in Paradise.

Here did she hold him, broken up with bliss,
Here, like a supple snake, around him coiled,
Here did she pluck his heart out with a kiss ;

Here were the wings clipped and the glory soiled,
Here adders coupled in the pure white shrine,
Here was the Wine spilt, and the Shew-bread spoiled.

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Black was that feast, though he who poured the Wine
Dreamed that he poured it in high sacrament.
Deep in her eyes he saw his own eyes shine,

Beheld Love's god-head and was well content.

Subtly her hand struck the pure silver note,
The throbbing chord of passion that God meant

To swell the bliss of heaven. Round his young throat
She wound her swarthy tresses ; then, with eyes
Half mad to see their power, half mad to gloat,

Half mad to batten on their own devilries,
And mark what heaven-born splendours they could
quell,
She held him quivering in a mesh of lies,

And in soft broken speech began to tell—
There, as against her heart, throbbing he lay—
The truth that hurled his soul from heaven to hell.

Quivering, she watched the subtle whip-lash flay
The white flesh of the dreams of his pure youth ;
Then sucked the blood and left them cold as clay.

Luxuriously she lashed him with the truth.
Against his mouth her subtle mouth she set
To show, as through a mask, O, without ruth,

As through a cold clay mask (brackish and wet
With what strange tears !) it was not his, not his,
The kiss that through his quivering lips she met.

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Kissing him, "*thus*," she whispered, "*did he kiss.*"

*Ah, is the sweetness like a sword, then, sweet ?
Last night—ah, kiss again—aching with bliss,*

Thus was I made his own, from head to feet."

—A sudden agony thro' his body swept
Tempestuously.—"*Our wedded pulses beat*

Like this and this ; and then, at dawn, he slept."

She laughed, pouting her lips against his cheek
To drink ; and, as in answer, Marlowe wept.

As a dead man in dreams, he heard her speak.

Clasped in the bitter grave of that sweet clay,
Wedded and one with it, he moaned. Too weak

Even to lift his head, sobbing, he lay.

Then, slowly, as their breathings rose and fell,
He felt the storm of passion, far away,

Gather. The shuddering waves began to swell,

And, through the menace of the thunder-roll,
The thin quick lightnings, thrilling through his hell,

Lightnings that hell itself could not control

(Even while she strove to bow his neck anew)
Woke the great slumbering legions of his soul.

Sharp was that severance of the false and true,

Sharp as a sword drawn from a shuddering wound.
But they, that were one flesh, were cloven in two.

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Flesh leapt from clasping flesh, without a sound.

He plucked his body from her white embrace,
And cast him down, and grovelled on the ground.

Yet, ere he went, he strove once more to trace,

Deep in her eyes, the loveliness he knew ;
Then—spat his hatred into her smiling face.

She clung to him—He flung her off. He drew

His dagger, thumbed the blade, and laughed—

“ Poor punk !

What ? Would you make me your own murderer,
too ? ”

“ That was the day of our great feast,” said Nash,

“ Aboard the *Golden Hind*. The grand old hulk

Was drawn up for the citizens' wonderment

At Deptford. Ay, Piers Penniless was there !

Soaked and besotted as I was, I saw

Everything. On her poop the minstrels played ;

And round her sea-worn keel, like meadow-sweet

Curtseying round a lightning-blackened oak,

Prentices and their sweethearts, heel and toe,

Danced the brave English dances, clean and fresh

As May.

But in her broad gun-guarded waist

Once red with British blood, long tables groaned

For revellers not so worthy. Where her guns

Had raked the seas, barrels of ale were sprung,

Bestrid by roaring tipplers. Where at night

The storm-beat crew silently bowed their heads

With Drake before the King of Life and Death,

A strumpet wrestled with a mountebank

For pence, a loose-limbed *Lais* with a clown

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Of Cherry Hilton. Leering at their lewd twists,
Cross-legged upon the deck, sluggish with sack,
Like a squat toad sat Puff
Propped up against the bulwarks, at his side,
Archer, his apple-squire, hiccoughed a bawdy song.

Suddenly, through that orgie, with wild eyes,
Yet with her customary smile, O, there
I saw in daylight what Kit Marlowe saw
Through blinding mists, the face of his first love.
She stood before her paramour on the deck,
Cocking her painted head to right and left,
Her white teeth smiling, but her voice a hiss :
'Quickly,' she said to Archer, 'come away,
Or there'll be blood spilt !'

'Better blood than wine,'
Said Archer, struggling to his feet ; 'but who,
Who would spill blood ?'

'Marlowe !' she said.

Then Puff

Reeled to his feet. 'What, Kit, the cobbler's son ?
The lad that broke his leg at the *Red Bull*,
Tamburlaine-Marlowe, he that would chain kings
To's chariot-wheel ? What, is he rushing hither ?
He would spill blood for Gloriana, hey ?
O, my Belphebe, you will crack my sides !
Was this the wench that shipped a thousand squires ?
O, ho ! But here he comes. Now, solemnly, lads,—
Now walk the angels on the walls of heaven
To entertain divine Zenocrate !'

And there stood Kit, high on the storm-scarred poop,
Against the sky, bare-headed. I saw his face,

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Pale, innocent, just the clear face of that boy
Who walked to Cambridge with a bundle and stick,—
The little cobbler's son. Yet—there I caught
My only glimpse of how the sun-god looked,
And only for one moment.

When he saw
His mistress, his face whitened, and he shook.
Down to the deck he came, a poor weak man ;
And yet—by God—the only man that day
In all our drunken crew.

‘ Come along, Kit,’
Cried Puff, ‘ we'll all be friends now, all take hands,
And dance—ha ! ha !—the shaking of the sheets ! ’
Then Archer, shuffling a step, raised his cracked voice
In Kit's own song to a falsetto tune,
Snapping one hand, thus, over his head as he danced:—

*‘ Come, live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove ! ’ . . .*

Puff reeled between, laughing. ‘ Damn you,’ cried
Kit,
And, catching the fat swine by his round soft throat,
Hurled him headlong, crashing across the tables,
To lie and groan in the red bilge of wine
That washed the scuppers.

Kit gave him not one glance.
‘ Archer,’ he said in a whisper.

Instantly
A long thin rapier flashed in Archer's hand.
The ship was one wild uproar. Women screamed
And huddled together. A drunken clamorous ring
Seethed around Marlowe and his enemy.

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

Kit drew his dagger, slowly, and I knew
Blood would be spilt.

‘ Here, take my rapier, Kit !’
I cried across the crowd, seeing the lad
Was armed so slightly. But he did not hear.
I could not reach him.

All at once he leapt
Like a wounded tiger, past the rapier point
Straight at his enemy’s throat. I saw his hand
Up-raised to strike ! I heard a harlot’s scream,
And, in mid-air, the hand stayed, quivering, white,
A frozen menace.

I saw a yellow claw
Twisting the dagger out of that frozen hand ;
I saw his own steel in that yellow grip,
His own lost lightning raised to strike at him !
I saw it flash ! I heard the driving grunt
Of him that struck ! Then, with a shout, the crowd
Sundered, and through the gap, a blank red thing
Streaming with blood, came the blind face of Kit,
Reeling, to me ! And I, poor drunken I,
Held my arms wide for him. Here, on my breast,
With one great sob, he burst his heart and died.”

.
Nash ceased. And, far away down Friday Street,
The crowder with his fiddle wailed again :

*“ Blaspheming Tamboltn must die
And Faustus meet his end.
Repent, repent, or presentlie
To hell ye must descend.”*

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

And, as in answer, Chapman slowly breathed
Those mightiest lines of Marlowe's own despair :

*" Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells ? "*

" Ah, you have said it," said Nash, " and there you know

Why Kit desired your hand to crown his work.
He revered you as one whose temperate eyes,
Austere and grave, could look him through and through,

One whose firm hand could grasp the reins of law
And guide those furious horses of the sun,
As Ben and Will can guide them, where you will.
His were, perchance, the noblest steeds of all,
And from their nostrils blew a fierier dawn
Above the world. That glory is his own ;
But where he fell, he fell. Before his hand
Had learned to quell them, he was dashed to the earth.

'Tis yours to show that good men honoured him.
For, mark this, Chapman, since Kit Marlowe fell,
There will be fools that, in the name of Art,
Will wallow in the mire, crying ' I fall,
I fall from heaven ! '—fools that have only heard
From earth, the rumour of those golden hooves
Far, far above them. Ay, you know the kind.
I am stained and tainted, Chapman, I am no saint.
I am shaken through and through with all the sins,
And yet, out of the muck wherein I lie,
Could I lift up my head, I'd tell such men

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

That muck's a narrow world, even for me ;
And that there's something in the seraphim,
A range of thought, even a passion or two,
Which God denied to maggots. Could you say it,
The fools would scorn you for your lack of fire,
Because you quelled the storms they never knew
And rode so far above them,—fools of Art
That skip and vex like little vicious fleas
Their only Helicon, some green madam's breast,
In one wild night with whom, they find more 'Art'
Than in the love that wellnigh makes them spew,
A life-long love, and an eternal truth.
Art ! Art ! O, God, that I could send my soul,
In one last wave, from that night-hidden wreck,
Across the shores of all the years to be ;
O, God, that like a crowder I might shake
Their blind dark casements with the pity of it,
Piers Penniless his ballad, a poor scrap,
That but for lack of time, and hope, and pence,
He might have bettered ! For a dead man's sake,
Thus would the wave break, thus the crowder cry :—

Dead like a dog upon the road ;
Dead, for a harlot's kiss ;
The Apollonian throat and brow,
The lyric lips, so silent now,
The flaming wings that heaven bestowed
For loftier airs than this !

The sun-like eyes whose light and life
Had gazed an angel's down,

The Sign of the Golden Shoe.

That burning heart of honey and fire,
Quenched and dead for an apple-squire,
Quenched at the thrust of a mummer's knife,
Dead—for a taffeta gown !

The wine that God had set apart,
The noblest wine of all,
Wine of the grapes that angels trod,
The vintage of the glory of God,
The crimson wine of that rich heart,
Spilt in a drunken brawl ;

Poured out to make a steaming bath
That night in the Devil's Inn,
A steaming bath of living wine
Poured out for Circe and her swine,
A bath of blood for a harlot
To supple and sleek her skin.

And many a fool that finds it sweet
Through all the years to be,
Crowning a lie with Marlowe's fame,
Will ape the sin, will ape the shame,
Will ape our captain in defeat ;
But—not in victory ;

Till Art become a leaping-house,
And Death be crowned as Life,
And one wild night out-shine the soul
Of Truth . . . O, fools, is this your goal ?
You are not our Kit Marlowe,
But the drunkard with the knife ;

The Sign of the Golaen Shoe.

Not Marlowe, but the Jack-o'-Lent
That lured him o'er the fen !
O, ay, the tavern is in its place,
And the punk's painted smiling face,
But where is our Kit Marlowe
The man, the king of men ?

Passion ? You kiss the painted mouth,
The hand that clipped his wings,
The hand that into his heart she thrust
And tuned him to her whimpering lust,
And played upon his quivering youth
As a crowder plucks the strings.

But he who dared the thunder-roll,
Whose eagle-wings could soar,
Buffeting down the clouds of night,
To beat against the Light of Light,
That great God-blinded eagle-soul,
We shall not see him more."

XXVI.

THE CAROL OF THE FIR-TREE.

Quoth the Fir-tree, "Orange and vine"

Sing 'Nowell, Nowell, Nowell'!

"Have their honour: I have mine!"

In Excelsis Gloria!

"I am kin to the great king's house,"

Ring 'Nowell, Nowell, Nowell'!

"And Lebanon whispers in my boughs."

In Excelsis Gloria!

Apple and cherry, pear and plum,

Winds of Autumn, sigh 'Nowell'!

All the trees like mages come

Bending low with 'Gloria'!

Holding out on every hand

Summer pilgrims to Nowell!

Gorgeous gifts from Elfin-land.

And the May saith 'Gloria'!

Out of the darkness, who shall say—

Gold and myrrh for this Nowell!—

How they win their wizard way?

Out of the East with 'Gloria'!

The Carol of the Fir-Tree.

Men that eat of the sun and dew,
Angels laugh and sing, ' Nowell '
Call it " fruit," and say it " grew " !
Into the West with ' Gloria ' !

" Leaves that fall," whispered the Fir
Through the forest sing ' Nowell ' !
" I am winter's minister."
In Excelsts Gloria !

Summer friends may come and go,
Up the mountain sing ' Nowell.'
Love abides thro' storm and snow.
Down the valley, ' Gloria ' !

" On my boughs, on mine, on mine,"
Father and mother, sing ' Nowell ' !
" All the fruits of the earth shall twine."
Bending low with ' Gloria.'

" Sword of wood and doll of wax "
Little children, sing ' Nowell.'
" Swing on the stem was cleft with the axe ! "
Craftsmen all, a ' Gloria.'

" Hear ! I have looked on the other side."
Out of the East, O sing ' Nowell ' !
" Because to live this night I died ! "
Into the West with ' Gloria.'
" Hear ! In this lighted room I have found "
Ye that seek, O sing ' Nowell ' !
" The spell that worketh underground."
Ye that doubt, a ' Gloria.'

The Carol of the Fir-Tree.

" I have found it, even I,"

Ye that are lowly, sing ' Nowell ' !

" The secret of this alchemy ! "

Ye that are poor, a ' Gloria.'

" Look, your tinsel turneth to gold."

Sing ' Nowell ! Nowell ! Nowell ! '

" Your dust to a hand for love to hold ! "

In Excelsis Gloria.

" Lay the axe at my young stem now ! "

Woodman, woodman, sing ' Nowell.'

" Set a star on every bough ! "

In Excelsis Gloria.

" Hall and cot shall see me stand,"

Rich and poor man, sing ' Nowell ' !

" Giver of gifts from Elfin-land."

Oberon, answer ' Gloria.'

" Hung by the hilt on your Christmas-tree "

Little children, sing ' Nowell ' !

" Your wooden sword is a cross for me."

Emperors, a ' Gloria.'

" I have found that fabulous stone "

Ocean-worthies, cry ' Nowell.'

" Which turneth all things into one."

Wise men all, a ' Gloria.'

" It is not ruby nor anything,"—

Jeweller, jeweller, sing ' Nowell ' !—

" Fit for the crown of an earthly king."

In Excelsis Gloria !

The Carol of the Fir-Tree.

- " It is not here ! It is not there ! "
Traveller, rest and cry ' Nowell ' !
- " It is one thing and everywhere ! "
Heaven and Earth sing ' Gloria. '
- " It is the earth, the moon, the sun, "
Mote in the sunbeam, sing ' Nowell ' !
- " And all the stars that march as one. "
In Excelsts Gloria !
- " Here, by the touch of it, I can see "
Sing, O Life, a sweet Nowell !
- " The world's King die on a Christmas-tree. "
Answer, Death, with ' Gloria. '
- " Here, not set in a realm apart, "
East and West are one ' Nowell ' !
- " Holy Land is in your Heart ! "
North and South one ' Gloria ' !
- " Death is a birth, birth is a death, "
Love is all, O sing ' Nowell ' !
- " And London one with Nazareth. "
And all the World a ' Gloria. '
- " And angels over your heart's roof sing "
Birds of God, O pour ' Nowell ' !
- " That a poor man's son is the Son of a King ! "
Out of your heart this ' Gloria ' !
- " Round the world you'll not away "
In your own soul, they sing ' Nowell ' !
- " From Holy Land this Christmas Day ! "
In your own soul, this ' Gloria. '

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